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C O N F I D E N T I A L ABIDJAN 000217

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KINSHASA PASS TO BRAZZAVILLE

E.O. 12958: DECL: 02/28/2016
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [ASEC](#) [KPKO](#) [IV](#)
SUBJECT: COTE D'IVOIRE: POLITICAL LEADERS' SUMMIT MEETING
POSTPONED

REF: ABIDJAN 199

Classified By: POL/ECON Jim Wojtasiewicz, reasons 1.4 (B) and (D).

¶1. (U) The meetings that were scheduled to take place February 27 between President Gbagbo and New Forces Secretary General Guillaume Soro; and between Gbagbo, Soro, former Prime Minister Ouattara and former President Bedie (reftel) did not happen, because of a disagreement over security arrangements.

¶2. (C) FN and political opposition contacts told us February 27 that it was agreed in advance that security at the site of the meetings, the Felix Houphouet-Boigny Foundation for Peace in Yamoussoukro, would be provided by Moroccan soldiers from the UN Operation in Cote d'Ivoire (UNOCI), backed up by French soldiers from the Licorne peacekeeping operation. When President Gbagbo's bodyguards from the Republican Guard arrived, they apparently demanded that the French forces withdraw from some of their positions, and they also insisted that Soro's NF bodyguards must be unarmed. With Gbagbo standing by in his Yamoussoukro presidential palace, Bedie and Ouattara in the President Hotel in Yamoussoukro, and Soro in Bouake (waiting to fly in by French military helicopter), the various security forces argued for hours but failed to reach agreement.

¶3. (C) Soro told the Ambassador February 28 that Bedie and Ouattara were just as concerned as he was about security arrangements, and had refused to leave their hotel until they felt safe. He said it was up to President Gbagbo to reassure others in terms of security. Soro noted that negotiations had resumed that morning, and he was hopeful that the meetings could still happen as early as the afternoon of February 28 or the morning of March 1. If not, Soro said he would fly down to Yamoussoukro anyway to meet with Bedie and Ouattara at their hotel, where adequate UNOCI/Licorne security arrangements are in place.

¶4. (C) Comment. This is disappointing but not surprising. It was the first time the four principal political leaders had attempted to meet in Cote d'Ivoire since the 2002 rebellion and failed coup attempt. They have met outside the country, under the auspices of international mediation, but never on their own soil. Their inability to follow through with the meeting underscores the deep divisions and mistrust in this country, and the lack of political will to compromise. However, Prime Minister Banny seems determined to make this happen, and President Gbagbo does seem prepared to reach out to his opponents. We are cautiously optimistic that the Ivoirians will soon be able to bring themselves to take this historic step forward in the peace process. End Comment.
Hooks